

“Teaching Grammar to Young Learners”

An Internship Report

Submitted to the Department of English and Humanities

Of BRAC University

Submitted by

Mehbuba Jahan Surovee

ID: 10103004

**In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree**

Of

Bachelor of Arts in English

April 2014



BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

“Teaching Grammar to Young Learners”

Mehbuba Jahan Surovee

ID: 10103004

Department of English and Humanities

April 2014



BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The successful accomplishment of this report is due to the support I received from many faculty members of ENH department. I am grateful to my supervisor Mohammad Mahmudul Haque for the support and guidance I received from him. I am also grateful for his effort and feedbacks which I found very useful for writing this paper. My deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to the honorable teacher, Prof. Firdous Azim, Chairperson, Department of English and Humanities, for supporting me during the internship. I am also grateful to Ms. Mehnaz Hossain, my co-worker at the New School Dhaka for her help during the internship.

Table of Content

1. Introduction	1
2. Literature Review	2
2.1. Inductive and Deductive Approach	2
2.2. Explicit Grammar Instructions	3
2.3. Contextualization	3
2.4. Communicative Grammar	4
2.5. Use of Interpretation Tasks	4
2.6. Use of Realia	5
2.7. Total Physical Response	5
2.8. Use of Literature	5
2.9. Use of Mathematics	6
3. Theories into Practice	6
3.1. Inductive Approach	6
3.2. Explicit Grammar Instructions	7
3.3. Implicit Grammar Instructions	7
3.4. Contextualization	8
3.5. Use of Interpretation Tasks	8
3.6. Use of Literature	9
3.7. Use of Pictures and Realia	10
3.8. Prescriptive and Descriptive Approach	11
4. Recommendation	12
5. Conclusion	13
6. Work Cited	14

Introduction:

In order to achieve my Bachelor degree, I was required to work as a trainee teacher at any school for three months. The New School Dhaka (NSD) is located near BRAC University, so I decided to start my internship there. Since it is an English medium school, the students are encouraged to speak English on campus. They have lots of classes for English teaching as well. In the junior section, students have literature, language, spelling/diction, reading and writing classes.

At the beginning of my internship I have observed all these classes of different levels. From my observation I concluded that learning grammar can be very useful to improve all language skills, particularly at the beginner level. Therefore I decided to observe language classes of class I with a focus on how grammar is taught.

There are many countries including Bangladesh where English is the L2 and people start learning English at a very young age. A teaching technique that is very useful to teach the adult learners may not work at all to teach young learners. Therefore the teacher needs to consider all the methods carefully before using them in a class.

During my internship I have observed several grammar classes. I have conducted some classes as well. In this paper I would discuss different theories of grammar teaching. I would also discuss the application of those theories to teach young learners based on my observation and teaching experience.

Literature Review:

Close (1982) defined English grammar as mainly a system of syntax that decides the order and patterns in which words are arranged in sentences (p. 13). Scrivener (1994) claimed that the grammar information in a learner's head is a living resource that allows the person to communicate and be understood. (p. 157) Dickins and Woods (1988) said, "When we say that someone 'knows a language,' we mean that this person has acquired the ability to produce grammatically acceptable sentences in the target language, together with an ability to use these forms correctly as the occasion demands." (p. 624)

Scrivener (1994) claimed, "For many years, 'learning the grammar' has assumed a central role in students' expectations about what learning a language involves." (p. 156) Kalivoda (1990) described the nature of grammar learning as a process which is complex and under considerable debate. He claimed, "It is not clear how much learners need to be told about grammar nor how much practice they require. If the grammar presentation is highly detailed, especially on the beginning level, Li is likely to be used." (p. 267)

Inductive and deductive Approach:

Brown (1972) claimed that some degree of both inductive and deductive learning is necessary. He suggested, "Both types of learning can lead to boredom and failure: our deductive explanations are often too long, abstract and unclear; our classroom discussions sometimes center about one small detail which interests only one or two students" He also claimed, "our carefully planned inductive drills lack that bit of zest that is needed to keep things lively and fresh. (Brown, 1972, p. 267)

Explicit Grammar Instructions:

Scheffler and Cinciała (2011) recommended the use of explicit grammar instruction for language teaching. Their research shows that simple rules can help learners to notice some of the formal L2 features they have been taught and use them to make sense of the input. Many learners can use these rules accurately during discussion as well. They also pointed out, “Since grammar rules foster the understanding of one’s grammatical output and, in this way, contribute to a sense of security, confidence, and achievement on the part of the learners, they contribute to the learning process in general. (Scheffler & Cinciała, 2011, p. 22)

Ellis (1995) claimed, “Traditionally, grammar teaching has been conducted by means of activities that give learners opportunities to produce sentences containing the targeted structure.” (p. 87) Petrovitz (1997) suggested that the student appreciates simplified rules since they are more concrete, and easier to internalize. (p. 204) Borg’s (1999) study shows that students expect grammar work. He found that students like to be made aware of their errors. He argued, “Grammar work based on the errors students make during fluency activities validates such activities in the students' eyes, and encourages initially reluctant students to accept these activities more enthusiastically.” (Borg, 1999, p. 158)

Contextualization:

Petrovitz (1997) suggested, “In addition to the use of specifically grammar-oriented materials, the working of semantically-based rules could be pointed out and discussed in reading or listening activities in which an extended context is present.” (p. 205) Nunan (1998) expressed similar opinion and claimed, “If learners are not given opportunities to explore grammar in

context, it will be difficult for them to see how and why alternative forms exist to express different communicative meanings.” (p. 102)

Schneider (2005) claimed, “In order to make language focus effective in a community-oriented lesson, it is necessary to go beyond the decontextualized, sentence-level presentations of grammar that dominate many pedagogic materials” He claimed that it would help them to see how speakers’ and writers’ grammatical choices reflect and construct those situations.

(Schneider, 2005, p. 299) Borg (1999) found, “Making students aware of parallels and contrasts between English grammar and that of their first language often allows them to understand the grammar under study more rapidly.” (p. 158)

Communicative Grammar:

Brown (1972) said, “Through communication the learner himself is better able to relate his new language to his own cognitive organization. At this stage ‘grammar’ itself is more easily adaptable to deductive explanations and class discussions.” (p. 269) Dickins and Woods (1988) recommended communicative tasks for grammar teaching as well. They claimed that these tasks can assist learners in developing an awareness of grammatical choice and the capacity to make the appropriate choices according to given contextual (Dickins & Woods, 1988, p. 636)

Use of Interpretation Tasks:

Ellis (1995) proposed an alternative approach to grammar teaching where activities are designed to focus learners' attention on a targeted structure which helps them to identify and comprehend the meaning of this structure. This approach emphasizes input processing for comprehension

rather than output processing for production and requires the use of ‘interpretation tasks’. (p. 88)

Brown (1972) suggested that language learning should be meaningful from the beginning stages.

He also suggested, “The distinctive items of a lesson must be related to existing cognitive structure, "subsumed" into an organized whole, or else they will be very easily forgotten.”

(Brown, 1972, p. 268)

Use of Realia:

Schneider (2005) suggested that bringing community issues into the classroom can be effectively used to teach grammar. He claimed, “It offers a way to give local culture and local concerns a prominent place in the English language classroom” and “provides an opportunity to make learning more engaging and relevant, because students have the opportunity to understand new material in terms of their own lives and realities.” (Schneider, 2005, p. 298)

Total Physical Response:

Scrivener (1994) claimed, “TPR, in fact, a whole methodology and has proved to be very successful, especially at low levels. Initially learners are given restricted exposure to a large number of instructions. Gestures and demonstration quickly help learners to understand the meaning.” (p. 182)

Use of Literature:

Kalivoda (1990) suggested that the teacher should consider the level of students carefully before using literature for grammar teaching. He claimed, “Much of the literature assumes an audience of learners presumed proficient in communication.” (Kalivoda, 1990, p. 267)

Use of Mathematics:

Williams (2006) proposed the use of mathematics to teach grammar. He claimed that English structures often behave in ways parallel to numbers. From his teaching experience he concluded that for a majority of the international and immigrant students in advanced writing classes, such mathematical concepts are already crystal-clear and have long been part of students' academic lives. (Williams, 2006, p. 23)

Theories into practice:

I have worked as an intern for three months at an English medium school. During my internship I have observed several English language classes of class I. The students of this level hardly have any knowledge of grammar, so the basic things such as nouns, verbs, adjectives and articles are taught in the class. Since it was an English medium school, the teacher always used English to communicate with the students. Though the students had Bangla L1 background and they were very young, the teacher could communicate in English effectively to teach grammar.

Inductive Approach:

I have observed that the language teacher usually uses inductive method for teaching. At first she provides some examples to the students. For instance, in one class she pointed at a student and asked them, "What is her name?" They replied "Archita." Then she pointed at other students and asked their names. After that she started pointing at different things such as chairs, tables, and schoolbags and asked them what those things were. The students answered her questions. After listening to their reply she told them that everything has a name. These naming words are called noun.

Explicit Grammar Instructions:

I have also observed that the teacher used explicit grammar instructions in her classes. For example, in one of the classes I observed she was teaching “numbers”. In the beginning of the class she briefly explained the concept of singular and plural number. Then she asked the students to draw a table in their class work copy. She drew a table on the board to show the students what should be done. Then she provided them a list of words and asked them to write the plural form of those words. When the students finished copying the list she started to talk about the rules they could use to complete this task.

She began with comparatively easy rules. For example, she instructed them to add ‘s’ after the words like ‘boy’, ‘girl’, ‘bag’ etc. Then she gave them words like ‘dish’, ‘fish’ etc and asked them to add ‘es’ after these words to make them plural. Then she gave them words such as ‘baby’, ‘leaf’ and ‘knife’ which were comparatively difficult. After making them practice all the rules used for changing words from singular to plural she provided them some words that did not follow any rules such as ‘ox’, ‘mouse’, ‘child’ and ‘sheep’. She provided the plural form of these words as well as the singular form. The same task was practiced in the following class and I found that the students hardly made any mistake. However, the words were presented out of context. Therefore, it is not clear whether they learnt to use these forms accurately while producing the target language.

Implicit Grammar Instructions:

However she did not use explicit grammar instruction in every class. In one of the classes I observed she taught the students how they can make sentences. Instead of teaching them the

sentence structure, she made the students write an essay about their best friend. She provided them with some questions and asked them to write the answers in their copy. Then she helped them to make sentences from those questions. For example, she asked “Can people live alone?” students replied “no.” Then she replaced “people” with “not” and added “people” at the beginning of the sentence. Then she told them that a sentence would usually start with a subject. She also informed them that “people” was the subject of this sentence. So they should put it at the beginning of the sentence and add a “not” after “can” to make it negative. Then she instructed the students to copy the statement from the board. She told them that it would be a good introduction for their essay. Then she provided them with more questions such as “Does everyone have friends?” and “Do you have friends?” and helped them to write the answers.

Contextualization:

During my internship I have observed that the teacher preferred contextualization for teaching. She instructed the students to write essays rather than producing isolated sentences. I also observed that the topics she chose for the essays were related to the real life experiences of the students. For example, in one class she asked them to write about their best friends. In another class on sentence making, she asked students to write an essay about themselves.

Use of Interpretation Tasks:

I have noticed that the teacher used tasks which appeared to be ‘interpretation tasks’ in the class. She focused more on the language input and tried to ensure that the students were able to identify and comprehend the meaning of the structures she taught in the class. For example, in one class she wrote some sentences on the board and asked them to identify nouns from those sentences.

The students made some mistakes. For instance, one of the students identified “playing” as noun. The teacher explained to them why it was not a noun. After that she pointed towards a boy and asked the students if she could say, “He is a Riddho.” The students replied in negative. Then she asked them if she could say, “He is a boy” and the students said, “Yes.” At that point she started talking about proper noun and common noun and explained the differences between them. Then she wrote some sentences in the board. Each of these sentences contained a proper noun and a common noun. She instructed the students to copy those sentences and then underline the common nouns and draw circles around the proper nouns. In another class she made the students practice similar exercises. In this class she wrote some sentences in the board and instructed the students to copy those. Then she asked them to underline the verbs and draw circles around the proper nouns.

Use of Literature:

In one class the teacher used literature to teach grammar. In this class she teacher asked the students to read a poem titled “The Winding Way”. While they were reading the poem the teacher helped them with the vocabulary. For example, the teacher explained that ‘winding’ means ‘not straight’. Then she drew two curved lines on the board to show the students how a winding way might look like. When they finished reading, she asked them to find out the adjectives from the poem and underline them. When this task was done she checked their work and helped them to find the adjectives they have missed. In this class the students seemed little confused. They failed to identify many adjectives from the text on their own. The teacher had to help them a lot.

Use of Pictures and Realia:

In the previous class the teacher introduced adjectives. Since the learners are young, she tried to make the class interesting by drawing pictures on the board. In the class I observed the teacher has drawn a flower on the board to get attention of the students. Then she asked them to name the things they can see in the picture. When the students replied, she asked them to describe the flower. The students came up with different words such as, 'nice', 'beautiful' and 'lovely'. Then the teacher informed them that words like these are called 'adjectives'. Then she gave them the definition of adjective and taught them how an adjective can be identified.

After explaining the concept she gave them more examples of adjectives by comparing things. At first she pointed towards the teacher's chair and described it as a 'big' and 'brown' chair. Then she pointed towards a student's chair and described it as a 'small' and 'red' chair. Then she asked the students to compare their school bags. During this discussion the students came up with more adjectives. Then she asked the students some questions to find out if the students have any confusion regarding adjectives. And finally she wrote some questions and answers on the board and asked the students to copy it.

At that point I observed that when the teacher wanted the students to take notes she gave them questions and answers rather than giving them passages. For example, instead of writing, "Adjectives are describing words. They describe nouns." She wrote "Q: What are adjectives?" Then she wrote the answer, "Ans: Adjectives are describing words." Then she wrote another question, "What do they describe?" and its answer in similar style. From these observations I have concluded that the learners of this age are more comfortable with question answer pattern.

If the teacher gives them only the statements and later ask them questions they might have problem relating the questions to the answers.

Drawing is a very effective way to get their attention. It can be used to teach vocabulary as well. In one of the classes I conducted, I instructed the students to draw a tree and identify different parts of it. I found this type of activities very useful to teach vocabulary.

Prescriptive and Descriptive Approach:

During my internship at The New School Dhaka, I have observed that the teacher mainly taught grammar in a prescriptive fashion. She taught the grammar rules for using articles or changing the words from singular to plural in the class. And it seems to me that this is very effective for language teaching at this stage. However descriptive approach was also used in the class. In one class the teacher talked about articles. She used elicitation at the beginning of this class. At first she asked them to give examples of vowels and consonants. Then she wrote some phrases on the board such as ‘a apple’, ‘an apple’, ‘a book’ and ‘an book’. She asked the students to choose the correct phrases from the list and helped them to find the right answers. Then she wrote the grammar rules applied for the use of articles on the board and asked the students to copy it. When they finished copying from the board she erased everything and gave them a new exercise. She asked them to fill in some blanks using ‘a’ and ‘an’. The students finished the task and submitted their copies to the teacher. Then the teacher checked their copies and made corrections where needed before returning the copies. She asked the students who made mistakes to write the correct answers and submit it again.

I have also observed that the teacher keeps reminding students the rules she had taught earlier in the class. I have also noticed that the students are unable to focus on what the teacher is saying while they are on task. As a result the teacher needs to repeat the same instructions several times.

Recommendation:

During the internship I have observed several English classes. Based on those observations I would like to suggest:

1. Total Physical Response is an efficient way to teach children. The teacher could have tried this method to teach verbs to the students.
2. The teacher used literature to teach grammar. Use of literature can be very effective way to teach the adult learners. However, it is not a suitable technique to teach children. At this level using literature would make the young learners nervous.
3. Children find colourful pictures very attractive. Therefore Pictures can be used to teach them grammar items such as nouns.
4. Use of worksheets can also facilitate their learning. Since the questions are already written in the worksheet, they do not need to copy these questions. As a result, they can complete their tasks faster.

Conclusion:

From my observation and teaching experiences I have concluded that teaching children is absolutely different from teaching adult learners. Children are hardly interested in grammar. Moreover they are unable to stay focused for long time. Therefore, teaching them grammar is really difficult.

However teaching grammar at this level is very important since it can help them to improve both their productive and receptive skills, so the teacher should try to make the class interesting by using colourful pictures and materials. Trying to make the lesson meaningful is also important. The teacher can use interpretation tasks to make the lesson meaningful. Contextualization is another effective way to help young learners to understand the lessons better.

On the contrary, decontextualization can make the class lessons difficult for the learners. Use of literature to teach beginners can also make the grammar item appear more complex to the children. Using implicit grammar instructions can be very useful in some situations. However the teacher should try to avoid it when possible. Both prescriptive and descriptive approach can be useful to a certain extent. In brief the teacher should use a number of appropriate teaching techniques to teach different grammar elements.

Works Cited:

- Borg, S. (1999), Teachers' theories in grammar teaching, *ELT Journal*, 53(3), 157-167
- Brown, H. D. (1972), The Psychological Reality of 'Grammar' in the ESL Classroom, *TESOL Quarterly*, 6(3), 263-269
- Close, R.A. (1982). English as a foreign language. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Dickins, P. M. & Woods, E. G. (1988), Some Criteria for the Development of Communicative Grammar Tasks, *TESOL Quarterly*, 22(4), 623-646
- Ellis, R. (1995). Interpretation Tasks for Grammar Teaching, *TESOL Quarterly*, 29(1), 87-105
- Kalivoda, T. B. (1990). Teaching Grammar in the Target Language, *Hispania*, 73(1), 267-269
- Nunan, D. (1998), Teaching grammar in context, *ELT Journal*, 52(2), 101-109
- Petrovitz, W. (1997), The role of context in the presentation of grammar, *ELT Journal*, 51(3), 201-207
- Scheffler, P. & Cinciała, M. (2011), Explicit grammar rules and L2 acquisition, *ELT Journal*, 65(1), 13-23
- Schneider, J. (2005), Teaching grammar through community issues, *ELT Journal*, 59(4), 298-305
- Scrivener, J. (1994), Learning Teaching: The Essential Guide to English Language Teaching (3rd ed.). Oxford: Macmillan Publishers Limited.
- Williams, H. (2006), Maths in the grammar classroom, *ELT Journal*, 60(1), 23-33